

April 1, 2008

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Spring is a good time to have your water well tested

As spring approaches, it is a good time for water well owners to get their water tested. Many Oklahoma City and Oklahoma County residents get their drinking water from private wells, Oklahoma City-County Health Department officials recommend testing once annually. Testing should also be done any time the water system is opened for maintenance or repair. Residents of Oklahoma City or Oklahoma County can bring water samples to OCCHD for testing.

It is not possible to know the quality of well water simply by its appearance, taste, and/or odor. Even if it looks clean it could still contain harmful bacteria that could adversely affect the health of families. Brad Finkhouse, OCCHD lab manager says, "The only way to know for sure the quality of your water is to get it tested."

You can see turbid or cloudy water and smell hydrogen sulfide, but senses will not usually detect contaminants that cause hard water or corrode pipes and stain sinks. No water taken from the environment will be chemically pure; however, most of the chemicals present occur at low, non-harmful levels and some are even be beneficial for consumption.

OCCHD is switching to a new water testing system, a Presence/Absence ttest. OCCHD will begin using the Present/Absence testing by May. Finkhouse says, "Present/Absence is the most reliable test available to identify harmful bacteria in drinking water."

Obtain a well water test kit with instructions from OCCHD for no charge. The cost for a bacterial test is \$10 and takes about 24 hours, while the standard well test costs \$30, tests for seven chemicals and normally takes about five to seven working days to receive the results.

The Safe Drinking Water Act resulted in the establishment of national standards for drinking water quality. The standards establish limits on the amounts of various substances that can adversely affect human health. These requirements pertain only to public water supplies. People getting their drinking water from a private well are

responsible for their own water quality. So it is important to have your water tested and then properly disinfect it if needed.

Groundwater is the source of water for our water wells in central Oklahoma. When it rains, some of the water hitting the ground soaks into the soil and slowly percolates downward. The water travels down through the soil until it reaches an impermeable layer and can go no farther. The water collects there and remains underground until it is pumped out or flows out in springs, seeps or streams. Although many people envision groundwater as occurring in lakes or streams, it is most commonly stored below ground in sand, gravel, or porous rock formations called aquifers. Groundwater aquifers occur at varying depths and vary in thickness. The amount and quality of water in different aquifers can vary greatly. This explains why two adjacent wells of different depths can have water of different quality. Water wells in central Oklahoma range from 15 to 1000 feet deep. Most private wells are in the range of 100 to 200 feet.

The quality of groundwater depends upon the substances dissolved by the water as it percolates through the soil. Water is an excellent solvent and will readily dissolve minerals in the soil and carry them to the various aquifers. It will also carry salts, agricultural chemicals and septic tank discharges. Usually, shallow water contains more of these soil-borne substances than deeper water. The water in aquifers moves very slowly, often only a few feet per year. As a result, the chemical quality of the groundwater at a given point usually changes very slowly.

For water well testing information, call 425-4340. For more information on this program and others, call 427-8651 or go the OCCHD website at: <http://www.cchdoc.com>. If you live in another part of the state, contact either the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality or a private lab listed in the telephone directory.